Despite the emergence of productivity-enhancing technologies over the past decade, many districts continue to cling to old, familiar ways of doing work.

Specifically, the way that districts collect and process information is largely manual, using an array of disconnected systems and antiquated methods. The general mindset is that “we’re aware of the challenges, but it’s difficult to find an effective yet affordable solution.” As internal and external pressures to become more efficient take center stage, many districts are looking for ways to streamline and automate workflows and processes.

Communication between parents, schools and the central office is the leading reason for accelerating districts’ digital transformation, and no process is more deeply impacted by this than the student registration process.

Student registrations involve multiple stages of data entry, collecting documentation, obtaining approvals and routing information to the right people, and all this needs to be orchestrated – this is where most of the energy and time is spent.

This article outlines the advantages of having an enterprise-grade integrated registration system.

- Enhanced parent experience
- Time savings, increased productivity
- Ease of accessibility

First impressions are important
Consider this: the student registration process is most likely the first interaction parents have with a school district. This first impression establishes in their mind how they can expect to communicate with the district going forward. Rather than disappoint them with complicated forms that need to be printed, manually filled out and emailed to the office, delight them with a modern electronic system that is specifically designed to make their registration process simple, transparent and fast!

It’s not just about improving the parent experience. That’s just a byproduct of having an efficient system. The real value is reducing the administrative burden that comes with manual-based processes, such as rekeying information into a student information system (SIS), collecting registration fees on time or simply chasing down missing documents, such as birth certificates, immunization records, etc. It’s no wonder that registration season is one of the most stressful times in the school year.

Moving from paper to pixels
Initial efforts to build a digital registration system usually start with the migration from paper forms to online tools to help collect information from parents. But these online tools are not designed to handle a multiple-step process that requires workflow, integration with other systems or student data privacy concerns.

While some districts have implemented an online version of their registration forms, we have found that these “online forms” are really just anonymous surveys that only satisfy one step in the process, capturing the student/guardian information, and that’s about all they do.

Because of this, when parents submit the forms, a series of back-and-forth communications are initiated via email, phone and sometimes in-person to verify the information and track down missing documents, all in pursuit of completing the registration process. Such methods cause delays, stunt productivity and lead to a slew of problems. This brings us to the next point.
Automation delivers
So it’s time to talk about automation. The word derives from “automatic,” which implies that it should happen seamlessly in the background, making your life easier with little or no human input. From a document management perspective, automation helps improve speed, accuracy, consistency and efficiency.

There are several ways automation supports efficient student registrations:
1. Instantaneously push student demographic data to the SIS
2. Trigger workflows, alerts and notifications to the registrar office
3. Prepopulate data fields based on preexisting data
4. Validate and verify data

Generally speaking, any work that is repetitive can be handled with automation. No matter how hard you try to hack PDFs and Word documents, there is just no way to prefill sections of forms using data from an external source. There is no API or script you can write for that.

Automation is a powerful tool that empowers educators to focus on more value-added tasks that require skill and human input.

Managing user access – especially after a role change – is often a reactive process that information technology prioritizes in order to protect data and ensure staff have access to the information they need for their new role. This is also true when custodial arrangements change – how do you ensure that student data is appropriately protected?

Ideally, the system you are using to collect data should authenticate the user and automatically control access to data based on their role assignment and district policies. Sounds too good to be true? We do this every day for our clients.

Student Onboarding
How do you know when student onboarding is successful in your institution? If you’ve been in education for any amount of time, you’ll know that answering this question can be difficult. When parents first receive the registration packet of forms and documents they need to complete, it can be overwhelming at first, so parents often drip-feed pieces of the onboarding documentation rather than submit it all at once.

It then becomes incumbent on the school or district to follow up with the parents and gently remind them of what is missing or inform them of next steps.

Having an automated system that can combine multiple forms and processes within one environment can help detect missing information and automatically send out reminders and notifications to the parents and school staff to ensure the process keeps moving forward and things are not forgotten.
Common student onboarding forms include:

- Student Registration Form
- Parent/Guardian Information
- Emergency Contact Card/Medical Form
- Home Language Identification
- Ethnic Race Identification
- Housing Questionnaire
- Parent Notification Letters
- Transportation Requests
- Internet Acceptable Use Agreement
- Photo Release Agreement
- Discipline and Attendance Agreement
- Application for Field Trip/School Volunteer
- Accessible Use Policies
- Parental Consent
- Proof of Residency
- Proof of Age
- Immunization Records
- Health Examination
- Health History
- Parent/Guardian Photo Identification
- Custody Documents or Proof of Guardianship/Foster Care
- Parent Registration Statement
- Medication Administration
- Request for Transfer of Records
- Media Release Form
- Parent Portal Access Form

Digital registration and student onboarding have allowed districts to leverage technology that completely removes physical interactions between schools and parents. The data extraction and reporting capabilities of modern digital onboarding allows districts to process registrations efficiently and usher parents through the onboarding process seamlessly and without confusion.

In summary, the advantages of digital registration and onboarding are as follows.

- Zero physical contact
- Registration and onboarding time reduced to minutes
- Data exchange capabilities with your SIS
- Integrate multiple processes into one form
- Stress-free and convenient for everyone

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